Ulysses S. Grant Life Story Outline

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Grant During the Civil War

A. Grant in the West, 1861-1863.
1. After Fort Sumter was attacked on April 12, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers, and Grant rejoined the army as a volunteer on April 23, 1861.

2. Grant was appointed Colonel of the 21st Illinois Regiment of Volunteers on June 17, 1861.

3. He established his headquarters in Cairo, Illinois, in command of the District of Southern Illinois and Southeastern Missouri, September 4, 1861.

   Occupied Paducah, Kentucky, giving the Union a strong foothold in the West without bloodshed, September 6, 1981.

4. In his first Civil War battle, Grant defeated a Confederate force at Belmont, Missouri, and then withdrew, November 7, 1861.

5. Captured Fort Henry on the Tennessee River, February 6, 1862.


   This, along with Fort Henry, was the first major Union victory of the war.
During the Civil War, 1861-1865

Grant wrote to Confederate General Simon Bolivar Buckner, "No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works." This earned him the nickname "Unconditional Surrender" Grant. Surrender of about 13,000 Confederates marked the largest capture of men in the history of the Western Hemisphere up to that time. Named (two-star) Major General of Volunteers.

7. Shiloh, April 6th-7th, 1862.

Grant faced General Albert Sidney Johnston, widely considered the finest soldier in the Confederate army. Johnston was killed during the battle and replaced by P.G.T. Beauregard. After initially being attacked and driven back, Grant won a staggering (but bloody) victory, demonstrating that the war would last much longer than many initially predicted.

8. Achieved victories at Iuka (September 19, 1862) and Corinth (October 4, 1862) in Mississippi.


10. The Vicksburg Campaign, November 2, 1862 to July 4, 1863.

Has gone down in history as one of the most brilliant displays of generalship in history. Vicksburg was considered a virtually impenetrable fortress and was the largest obstacle to Union control of the Mississippi, a critical aim of the war. After the seemingly dormant Campaign of the Bayous, Grant made a daring move across the Mississippi River with inferior numbers. He won five battles in 17 days: Port Gibson (May 1st), Raymond (May 12th), capture of Jackson, Mississippi (May 14th), Champion's Hill (May 16th), and Big Black River Bridge (May 17th). Attempted two unsuccessful assaults on Vicksburg (May 19th and 22nd). Placed Vicksburg under siege from May 19th to July 4th. Confederate General John C. Pemberton surrendered Vicksburg on July 4, 1863. This marked the largest capture of men and arms in history up to that point: 30,000 troops, including 15 generals, and 172 cannon were surrendered. The Confederacy was now virtually divided in half, and the South had suffered perhaps its worst strategic blow in the entire war.

11. Grant was named commander of the Grand Division of the Mississippi, which placed him in command of the Western theater of the war, on October 16th, 1863.


Achieved victory at Ochard Knob, November 23rd, 1863. Achieved victory at Lookout Mountain, November 24th, 1863.
During the Civil War, 1861-1865

Achieved victory at Missionary Ridge, November 25th, 1863, one of the most remarkable tactical victories of the war.

These victories gave the Union control of Chattanooga, a major east-west railroad junction, and marked the successful completion of Grant's western campaigns.

B. Grant in the East, 1864-1865.

1. Commissioned (three star) Lieutenant General, March 9th, 1864, the first man to hold that rank since George Washington, and named Supreme Commander of the Union Armies by President Lincoln on March 12th.

2. Grant gained status as perhaps the first of the world's modern generals as he achieved the following:

   An innovator by nature, Grant grew as a general during his three years in the West.
   The lessons he learned throughout his campaigns contributed to his development as the first of world's truly modern generals.
   The Wilderness Campaign is often regarded as opening the first full modern campaign of warfare because of the following:
   a. Grant as general-in-chief began a new period of Union command.
   b. Instead of armies acting independently in the Western and Eastern theaters, with battles individually deciding the fate of campaigns, Grant coordinated Union armies throughout the Confederacy, engaging the enemy at important points simultaneously and continuously.
   c. Union offensives in different regions were interdependent upon each other for ultimate Union success.
   d. Armies, rather than cities, became principal targets.
   e. Armies were to be decisively defeated whenever possible, but where that could not be accomplished, constant force and attrition would maintain the strategic initiative and prevent Confederate armies from upsetting Union efforts in other areas.
   f. Unlike generals before him, Grant had a unique understanding of the relationship between war and politics and applied it to his strategy.

3. The Wilderness Campaign, May 5th-June 17th.

   The Wilderness, May 5th-7th, 1864.
   a. Acting as de facto commander of the Army of the Potomac, Grant faced Robert E. Lee, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, for the first time.
   b. After Grant crossed the Rapidan River on May 4th, the two armies engaged in heavy, sometimes desperate, fighting, with severe losses on both sides (17,000 for the Union, 11,000 for the Confederates).
   c. The battle could be considered a tactical stalemate but a strategic victory. Lee failed to halt Grant's progress southward, and Grant had taken control of the strategic initiative. Within three days, he had brought the Union initiative in the East to greater heights than it had reached in three years.
   Spotsylvania, May 8-12, 1864.
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a. Another tactically indecisive battle marked by heavy fighting but progress for the Union.
b. Battle of the Bloody Angle, May 11, 1864: although he did not break through Lee's lines, Grant inflicted heavy losses on Lee (9,000-10,000) and strategically crippled him.
c. Grant wrote to General Halleck on May 11, "I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer."

Operations on the North Anna River, May 23rd-26th, 1864 forced Lee to withdraw to powerful entrenchments south of the river, and instead of pursuing a frontal assault, Grant decided on another maneuver southward.

Cold Harbor, June 1-3, 1864. Grant suffered heavy losses (5,000-7,000) during a disastrous June 3 frontal assault.

Grant crossed the James River between June 15 and 18, 1864. This was on the great maneuvers of the war. Grant moved over 100,000 troops south of the river before Lee could learn of the movement in time to stop it.

4. The Petersburg Campaign, June 18, 1864-April 2, 1865.

Grant besieged Lee in Petersburg, the "breadbasket" of Richmond, the Confederate capital.
It was a campaign of attrition with trench warfare and is often viewed as the precursor of World War I.
Grant captured Fort Harrison in a surprise attack on September 29, 1864.

Treatment of black soldiers:
a. Grant was a supporter of the recruitment of black soldiers during the Civil War.
b. Upon learning that Confederates were enslaving, murdering, and otherwise brutalizing black prisoners of war, Grant demanded equal treatment of all captured troops.
c. Lee refused, so Grant refused to engage in further prisoner exchanges, leading to heavy buildups in prisoner-of-war camps.

Lee made a failed attack on Fort Stedman as a last-ditch effort to launch an offensive on March 25th, 1865.
The Battle of Five Forks, April 1st, 1865, forced Lee to abandon Petersburg as Grant broke through his lines.
Petersburg captured, April 2nd, 1865.

5. The Appomattox Campaign, April 2-9, 1865.

Richmond captured April 3, 1865.

Victory achieved at Sayler's Creek, April 7, 1865.

Lee's surrender took place at Appomattox Court House, April 9, 1865 (Palm Sunday)
a. Grant's generous terms set the tone for peace. 21,000 prisoners were paroled, officers were allowed to keep their sidearms, and those with horses could keep them for the spring plowing.
b. The Civil War was virtually ended and the nation was reunited. Surrenders of other armies followed.
During the Civil War, 1861-1865

Please return to the Students page in LibGuides for the other segments of Grant’s life history.

- Grant’s Early Years, Through the Start of the Civil War, 1822-1861
- Grant as General-in-Chief, After the Civil War, 1865-1869
- Grant’s Presidency, 1869-1877
- Grant’s Later Years, 1877-1885

Further reading: Ulysses S. Grant Chronology, at the Ulysses S. Grant Association website.

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